Factsheet

The Conditions of Gazan Workers beyond the Green Line after the Declaration of the War on Gaza Strip

Introduction

Since the beginning of the ongoing war on Gaza Strip, the lives of civilians have been clearly targeted by continued bombings and airstrikes launched by the Israeli war machine on Gaza Strip. The power of the bombs that have been thrown on Gaza are estimated to be stronger than the nuclear bomb that hit Hiroshima in WW2. The war on Gaza Strip has been accompanied by numerous assaults and violations against Gazan workers in the green line and considered them "illegal workers", which has caused them great tragedy. To this day, there aren't any accurate numbers or statistics on such attacks, as they were extorted by their Israeli employers and were subject to grave violations by the occupation authorities. Such violations included transferring them back to Gaza Strip without any guarantees of protection. Many workers remain at risk inside the green line and in the West Bank, particularly in light of the PA's weak sense of legal and social responsibility towards them. The fate of thousands of workers' remains unknown, since many of them are missing or are still inside the green line with nowhere safe to go.

First: The Tragedy of Gazan Workers in Light of the so –called "Illegal Workers" Status

Around (17,000) Gazan workers who were in the green line when the Israeli government declared war on the Palestinian people are undergoing compound suffering, as they are disconnected from their families and are deprived from their basic human rights. This situation was accompanied by a decision from the occupation's Civil Administration Liaison to cancel all work permits granted to these workers. Accordingly, any of these workers that are in Israel, or the West Bank now have an "illegal" status, subjecting them to arrest and abuse. At the same time, they are unable to return to their homes because all border crossings to Gaza have been closed by the Israeli authorities. These new circumstances have transformed the legal status of these workers into illegal residents in the West Bank and they remain at risk of being arrested by the occupation authorities. In fact, many of them have been arrested in Hebron and on the way between the governorates of Ramallah and Jericho, which exacerbates their suffering while their families are being

displaced and killed on a daily basis. Some of these workers have indeed lost family members to the bombardment and war machine.

Second: Gazan Workers – Numbers and Statistics

According to official numbers, the number of Palestinian workers from Gaza Strip who have obtained work permits to work in the green line in 2023 is around (18500) workers[1], (1500) of whom are workers working in Gaza envelope who travel back and forth from Gaza Strip on a daily basis. According to the statement of some of their colleagues, these workers have not gone to work on 7 October because it was Sabbath[2]. The larger number of workers, which is estimated at (17,000) normally sleep at their workplaces due to the difficulty in moving back and forth through Beit Hanoun Crossing "Erez". This large number of workers have found themselves subject to different acts of violence and revenge on the morning of 7 October by their employers, Israeli police, and military. Based on unofficial information, around (4000) workers have been arrested by the Israeli occupation authorities from different areas in the green line.

The number of Gazan workers received in the West Bank reached (6200) workers as of the seventh of November 2023 based on official estimates[3]. These workers are distributed in different governorates in the West Bank, 1800 in Jericho, 970 in Qalqilia, 1162 in Ramallah, 550 in Nablus, 386 in Hebron, 282 in Tubas, 350 in Jenin, 260 in Jerusalem, 156 in Bethlehem, 147 in Tulkarm, and 67 in Salfit. They were received and registered in many centers throughout the West Bank.

Third: the Exploitation, Extortion and Murder Threats by Employers

Israeli employers have taken the events of the war declared by the Israeli occupation government against Gaza Strip as an excuse. Some workers have reported that they have been subject to physical assault and murder threats by their employers. They have also been extorted, as their employers refused to pay their wages. This resulted in them seeking a safe haven, and many of them headed towards border crossings to the West Bank in the governorates of Jenin, Tulkarm, Qalqilia and Hebron. Others were arrested by the occupation authorities while attempting to enter the West Bank. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and official government bodies organized the reception of those who were able to enter the West Bank.

Fourth: Violations Faced by Gazan Workers from the Occupation Authorities

[1] The source, Minister of Labor, meeting with representatives from Hurryyat and Bisan on 7/11/2023, Ministry of Labor Headquarters.

[2] Statements of workers to the researchers of Bisan and Hurryyat.

[3] The source, Minister of Labor, meeting with representatives from Hurryyat and Bisan on 7/11/2023, Ministry of Labor Headquarters.

Workers have suffered different forms of torture, abuse and being photographed in humiliating circumstances. Videos have shown Palestinian workers stripped completely naked. These videos have been circulated on Israeli social media pages by Israeli soldiers in order to show off and feed the rapidly growing vindictive tendancies[4]. This information has also been documented through the statements of some workers who have later been released from Ofer detention center in Ramallah. The occupation authorities released around 3200 workers who were detained at Ofer and Anatot military camps and returned them to Gaza Strip on 4/11/2023[5]. One of these workers was martyred due to the beatings he received while crossing Karm Abu Salem border crossing. There is no information on the number of workers that the occupation authorities still detain to this date, particularly since it was reported that many workers were arrested, the latest of whom were 70 who were arrested from Barta'a town behind the wall on 12/11/2023. There is also no information on around 250 workers who were reported missing by their colleagues to Palestinian human rights organizations. Meanwhile, there are daily requests from the families of workers in Gaza Strip through the media and social media asking for information on the missing workers, however, the Israeli government refused to reveal any information on them to Israeli human rights organizations. The Israeli Center for the Defence of the Individual "Hamoked" submitted an appeal to the Israeli High Court on this matter.

Fifth: Transfer under Fire and Lack of Legal Guarantees for Protection

On 10/11/2023, 970 workers were transferred to Gaza Strip through coordination between the Palestinian Civil Affairs and the Israeli DCO. The Ministry of Labor covered the registration process of workers wishing to return to Gaza Strip. We (Bisan Center and Hurryyat Center) stressed at the time that as a humanitarian step, their transfer should not be approved in light of the harsh and unsafe circumstances in Gaza Strip due to the continued Israeli attack, as well as due to the lack of any international body to ensure their safe transfer from the West Bank to their homes in Gaza Strip.

Based on the statements of some workers who were contacted after arriving to Gaza Strip, the busses that transferred them from Jericho entered an Israeli military post near Jericho. They were taken down from the busses and searched under humiliating circumstances. Then their hands were tied behind their backs using plastic bindings, and their legs were tied together using the same bindings. Their heads were covered using

[4] https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/10/31/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%82

[5] According to media and unofficial sources in Gaza Strip.

a black cover and every two workers were tied together from the legs. They were then taken to military transport vehicles that are used to transport detainees and fit 35 people with the company of five soldiers in each vehicle. They remained under these circumstances for seven hours until they arrived at Karm Abu Salem crossing without allowing them a drink of water or to relieve themselves. All their clothings and belongings were confiscated with the exception of their mobile phones. Workers lost all their clothes, personal belongings and any food they have purchased for their families. Some of them even stated that they lost some cash because of this prohibition, the confiscation of their belongings and purchased items or because they placed their cash in their clothes bags that were confiscated, which they were not allowed to access by the occupation authorities.

The number of workers transferred to Gaza strip increased, as a second batch of workers estimated at (1400) were transferred on 15/11/2023 through coordination between official Palestinian and Israeli bodies under the same circumstances of those transferred in the first batch. The workers who arrived to Gaza Strip affirmed that they have been subjected to the same humiliating procedures as those transferred on 5/11/2023[6]. Some added that the occupation authorities arrested 23 workers while they were at the military post near Jericho and took them to places unknown. Their fate is yet to be known. According to the statements of some women, a total of six women who were either receiving treatment or accompanying patients at West Bank and Jerusalem hospitals were also transferred, and were subjected to the same humiliating procedures in their return to Gaza Strip. As such, the total number of workers transferred back to Gaza Strip through coordination between the Palestinian and Israeli sides amounted to 2500 workers.

Sixth: Legal and Social Protection for Gazan Workers

The Palestinian Authority has a legal responsibility to provide all means of a dignified life to Palestinian workers from Gaza Strip, as they are citizens who enjoy full social and economic rights. It is the PA's responsibility to ensure their safety and protect their lives, and to ensure they are not driven to return to Gaza Strip and face the risks that lie there or that they are temporarily hosted without legal and social protection. Although many workers have demanded to return to their families, and their concern and need to be with their families in the severely dangerous circumstances in Gaza Strip is understandable, this does not constitute an excuse to revoke their right to protection from danger and their right to legal protection. Accordingly, they must not be endangered by directly coordinating with the Israeli occupation authorities without the involvement of international bodies such as ICRC, who in turn refused to assume such a

[6] Statements of workers randomly contacted by the researchers of Bisan Center and Hurryyat

responsibility through an official announcement on their Facebook page on 9/11/2023. The ICRC have denied having any role in the transfer of workers from the West Bank to Gaza Strip.

Seventh: What the Future Holds

In light of the continued arrival of Gazan workers to the West Bank, and the return of (5700) workers to Gaza Strip, including (3200) who were detained by the occupation authorities and later released and returned to Gaza Strip and the (2500) who were returned through coordination between the Palestinian Liaison Office and the Israeli DCO. There is no information on whether they have been reunited with their families or not, or if they have been subject to the danger that is overwhelming the Gaza Strip. The number of workers remaining in the West Bank is (4000) in addition to 250 workers reported missing. As such, the total number of workers whose fate is known is around (10000) out of a total of (17000), whereas the fate of (7000) workers remains to be known which calls for collective efforts from all stakeholders to pressure the Israeli authorities to reveal their fate.

We urgently call on all official and relevant bodies to:

First: mobilize third parties in Geneva Conventions and hold them responsible and put pressure on the occupation authorities to provide protection to Gazan workers who are still in their territories, as well as reveal the fate of the missing workers and ensure their safe return.

Second: the International Labor Organization must take urgent measures to ensure the provision of all necessities for a dignified life for workers who have lost their jobs, and pressure the Israeli side to ensure they received their due wages from their employers.

Third: ICRC must assume its responsibilities in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and ensure the safe return of workers to the Gaza Strip.

Fourth: the PA must provide suitable locations to host workers and provide all the required needs for a decent living, as well as provide medical services, treatment and basic care and relief until the attack on the Gaza Strip is halted. Workers must have the right to personal self-determination in deciding when to return when circumstances are suitable, including ensuring their physical safety and dignity.

END

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